



West Valley City POLICE



Office of Chief Lee W. Russo
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WVCPD Launches Campaign Urging Support for Sexual Assault Victims as well as New Special Victims Unit

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The West Valley City Police Department is pleased to announce the official launch of our agency's *Start by Believing* public awareness campaign as well as the creation of a new Special Victims Unit dedicated to the investigation of sexual assault cases.

The campaign is called *Start by Believing* because the first person a victim confides in after an assault is typically a trusted friend or family member. How that person reacts determines in large part what happens next. Knowing how to respond is critical—a negative response can worsen the trauma and foster an environment where sexual assault predators face zero consequences for their crimes.

By promoting the *Start by Believing* message, we aim to set an example in our community that says, *when someone is sexually assaulted, we will start by believing the victim and so should you*. Positive support is critical for victims to become engaged – and remain engaged – in the criminal justice system. **Our goal is to improve personal reactions and change outcomes for victims, one response at a time.**

This message does not change the perspective of objectivity required to be a credible professional, nor does it change our intention to conduct a thorough investigation. We know, however, that when victims are approached from the perspective that they are lying, they will often be unable – or unwilling – to provide the type of information needed for law enforcement to successfully investigate the case. A thorough investigation must therefore ensure that the

person is treated with compassion and respect, and that the report is handled professionally – instead of communicating the message (either explicitly or implicitly) that I *don't* believe you.

The West Valley City Police Department has made unprecedented efforts to improve our service to, and support of, victims of crime. We have made remarkable progress through our understanding of the impact trauma has on sexual assault victims. We are leading the way in implementing new protocols that ensure compassionate treatment for sexual assault victims. The *Start by Believing* campaign solidifies our commitment to provide the best and most effective service to our community.

As part of our commitment to best serve our community, WVCPD has also established a new, dedicated Special Victims Unit for the investigation of sexual assault cases. This special team of highly-skilled and well-trained detectives will enhanced the Police Department's efficiency and effectiveness in investigating sexual assaults and other violent. More specifically, these crimes are typically the most complex and difficult to handle due to the traumatic impacts experienced by victims and witnesses. Having investigators specially trained to deal with post traumatic effects and well experienced in conducting these types of investigations will improve our ability to successfully conduct investigations, support the needs of victims and witnesses, and aid in improving the likelihood of prosecutions and convictions.



The WVCPD Special Victims Unit is comprised of one sergeant and eight detectives

The *Start by Believing* campaign was developed by End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI). You can learn more about the campaign at www.startbybelieving.org

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